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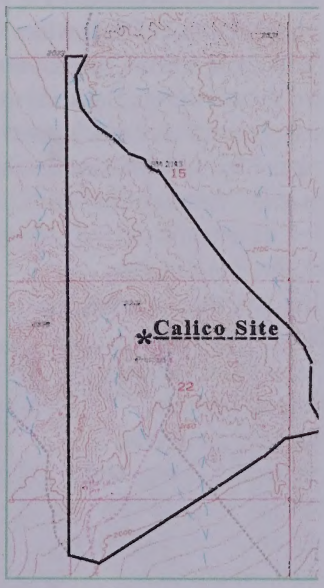
CALICO ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISTRICT

The Calico Archaeological District includes about 900 acres in the central Mojave Desert, just 16 miles east of Barstow. Less than 20,000 years ago, a person standing in the Calico Mountains would look south and east and see a huge lake surrounded by sandy beaches, marshes, and mud flats. The Calico Archaeological District contains artifacts of the some of the earliest human activity in North America.

Location of the district in California

Today, the lake is dry, and the arid environment supports catclaw, mesquite, and cacti including varieties of *Opuntia* such as beavertail and cholla. Creosote and brittle bush are the most common desert bushes in the district. The district supports over 80 species of desert flowers and numerous species of grasses, herbs, and gourds. Most of the birds are adapted to arid conditions. Numerous reptiles are in the district, including the protected desert tortoise and the dangerous rattlesnake and sidewinder. The bobcat and coyote are the largest mammals.

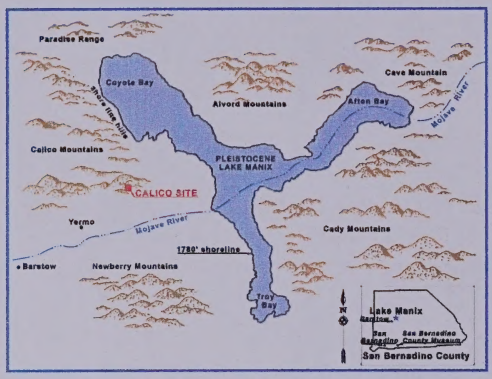
The Calico Archaeological District includes the Ritner Sayles Nature Trail, which starts at the Calico Early Man Site. This easy less than 2-mile trail has a printed guide to introduce the visitor to the landscape around the Calico Site as it is today. The stops along the trail are focused on some aspect of the environment, ranging from "desert pavement" to arid plant and animal life.



The Calico Archaeological District

THE LAKE MANIX LITHIC INDUSTRY

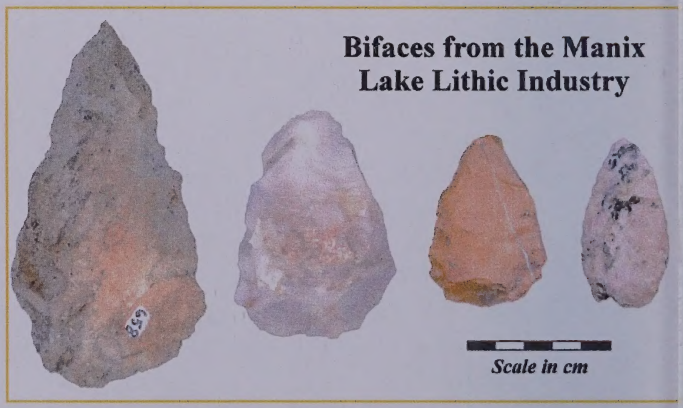
The Lake Manix Lithic Industry is the name given to the stone tool technology in prehistoric archaeology sites that surround Pleistocene Lake Manix. Many of these sites are within the Calico Archaeological District and are thought to be part of this tradition. The last stand of Lake Manix was around 18,000 years ago, and the sites above the 1780-foot shoreline are believed to date to about 18,000 years ago. At that time, the air would have been filled with storks, pelicans, and flamingos, and bison and other large animals would have been foraging along the lake shores.



Pleistocene Lake Manix

Before 18,000 years ago, the climate was much wetter than it is today. The lake shore consisted of marshes, mud flats, and open sandy beaches. Alluvial fans around the lake probably were covered with juniper, sagebrush, creosote bushes, and related plants. Within the basin, grassy areas were scarce and patchy.

The fossils remains of the Mojave tui chub, various fresh-water clams, fresh-water snails, and the western pond turtle attest to the limits and nature of the lake. About 80% of the fossil birds lived on or preferred to feed on small fish; about 20% fed on water plants or fresh water clams. Among the fossil birds are pelicans, storks, flamingos, swans, geese, ducks, gulls, and eagles. The fossils of large mammals are the remains of animals that died near the lake margin. Carnivores and water action separated and scattered these skeletons, but a few bones were quickly buried by soft lake mud. Subsequent mineralization preserved these bones as fossils. Among the fossils are ground sloths, mammoths, dire wolves, coyotes, bears, mountain lions, scimitar cats, horses, camels, llamas, antelopes, mountain sheep, and bison. Jack rabbits and mice are the only small mammals known as fossils.



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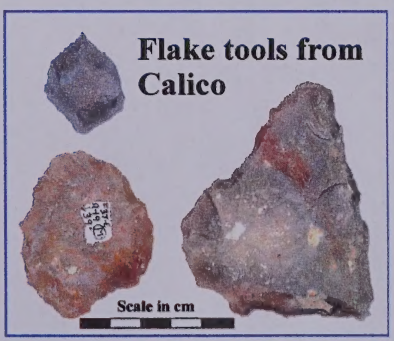
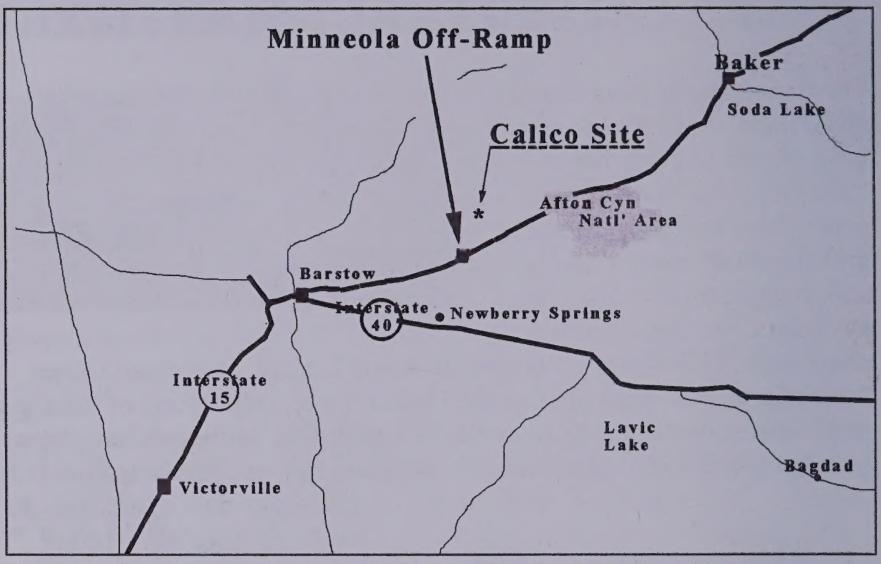
THE CALICO EARLY MAN SITE

The Calico Site is located on an alluvial fan above Pleistocene Lake Manix, at elevation of 2200 feet. The prehistoric people who occupied the site probably made use the lake's abundant resources. The site has been excavated continuously since 1964. It is the only site that Dr. Louis Leakey, of Olduvai Gorge, Africa fame, ever worked on in the United States. The dating of the site is still controversial. At the Calico Site's Master Pits, sediments have been dated to 100,000, 135,000, and 200,000 years ago, and artifacts from these levels may date to this age. In the Rock Wren pit, a biface (stone tool) was recovered in a sediment that yielded a date of 14,400 years ago. But, the 18,000+ year-old dates of the Lake Manix Lithic Industry may be the correct date for the artifacts from the Calico Site.

The Calico Site is a quarry and tool production site on an alluvial , where chalcedony and chert were found in abundance. Many prehistoric tools were made from these rocks. It might also have been a campsite where prehistoric people stayed overnight when they were working at the quarry. No human remains have been found in the site's deposits. The site is open for visitors, students and researchers. The three master pits are almost 26 feet deep and show the geology of the alluvial fan. Visitors are welcome to photograph the site.

References: Bowers, D., Cardiff, E., and Sanders, R. Biological Overview, in The Lake Manix Lithic Industry, *SBCMQ* 45 (3,4):9-11, 1998.
Jefferson, G., Late Pleistocene Biota from Lake Manix, in The Lake Manix Lithic Industry, *SBCMQ* 45 (3,4):39-47, 1998.
Simpson, R. The Lake Manix Industry. *SBCMQ* 45 (3,4), 1998.
Simpson, R. The Calico Early Man Site Lithic Assemblage. *SBCMQ* 35(3), 1989.





From the San Bernardino County Museum, take Interstate 10 west to Interstate 215 north. Take Interstate 215 north to Interstate 15 north. The Calico Site is located 16 miles northeast of Barstow. Exit at Minneola Road, turn left, and follow the signs 2.5 miles along paved and graded dirt roads to the site.

The Calico Early Man Site is open Wednesday, 12-5 PM, and Thursday-Sunday, 8 AM to 5 PM for visitors.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Dig at the site: 1st weekend of the month except during June, July, and August

Lab work at San Bernardino County Museum: 1st and 3rd Saturday of every month

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Contact the Curator of Anthropology
2024 Orange Tree Lane
Redlands, CA 92374
(909) 307-2669 x266
aschroth@sbcm.sbcounty.gov
or
The Friends of Calico Early Man Site
% San Bernardino County Museum
2024 Orange Tree Lane
Redlands, CA 92374
(909) 307-2669 x265

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